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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how various perspectives influence inquiry in education. Normative perspectives function as implicit theories of inquiry as a researcher undertakes formal inquiry, and such theories should be acknowledged. Epistemological as well as methodological issues raised by conceiving of such theories as normative rather than merely procedural are discussed, and a plea is made for all educational scholars to recognize the place of their theories of inquiry in their research activities. A theory of inquiry should be both acknowledged and, in fact, chosen deliberately and self-consciously to follow inquiry processes in a reasoned and open manner. In more qualitative research, there has been more acknowledgment of the role of normative theory of inquiry. Examples are given in the work of aesthetic inquiry in education and in phenomenological and hermeneutical inquiry. The form of inquiry that most carefully defines its normative perspective is that known as critical inquiry. The summary point is that the use of multiple theories of inquiry in educational research is evident and that this should be acknowledged and accepted. (SLD)

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THE USE OF MULTIPLE THEORIES OF INQUIRY IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Assoc.
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THE USE OF MULTIPLE THEORIES OF INQUIRY IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association,
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This paper addresses the issue of how various perspectives influence inquiry in education. This analysis takes the form of extending work begun in my "Understanding Curriculum Inquiry" (Forms of Curriculum Inquiry, 1991, edited by E. C. Short). As patterns of inquiry were explicated by various authors in that book (seventeen in all—from philosophical to historical to scientific to aesthetic to critical to deliberative), these writers frequently alluded to the role that differing perspectives or schools of thought have on the use of a given research methodology. This dimension of inquiry, however, was not explored in any great detail by these authors. I asserted that these normative perspectives functioned as implicit theories of inquiry as a researcher undertakes formal inquiry and that such theories should be acknowledged.

The present paper explicates this assertion and illustrates various theories of inquiry associated with several of the seventeen forms of inquiry described in the book. The significance of making explicit the operative theory of inquiry employed in each instance of formal inquiry rather than leaving it unstated or hidden is discussed. Epistemological as well as methodological issues raised by conceiving such theories of inquiry as normative in character rather than merely procedural are also discussed. A plea is made for all educational scholars to recognize the place of their theories of inquiry in their research activities. Just as professors of education are increasingly acknowledging the role of values in their own teaching and in educating

professional educators under their charge, so also should they acknowledge the place of normative (value) perspectives in doing their own research and scholarship.

Let me begin by quoting a passage from the end of my book (p. 331) where I reflect on the issues one might raise about the use of multiple theories of inquiry as they are described in the preceding chapters.

> Another complaint that might be registered is that several of these writers do not deal with the various orientations that researchers bring to their work that govern the way they perceive and use the same form of inquiry—what is referred to in the opening essay as theories of inquiry. It is inevitable that some view of how best to orient the particular form of inquiry might be adopted by a researchers. It may be rationalistic or technical, humanistic or metaphysical, or any one of a number of other value orientations. This is what Huebner identified as systems of rationality. They color the choice of concepts and language that emerge within the inquiry.
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> Some scholars suggest that research is value-free, relying solely upon the dictates of standard methodologies to produce knowledge. Yet it is evident that among those who use the same form of inquiry there are several "schools of inquiry" which reflect different ways of interpreting the use of the methodology. These differences can be argued but the arguments cannot be settled. In the end one has to adopt an orientation one believes is most valid.

For example, in the case of doing historical research, it is quite readily acknowledged that the historical artifacts—primary records, newspaper interviews, physical evidence—do not in

and of themselves reveal the true story of what happened at some point of time in the past. The historian must interpret this evidence as plausibly as one can, often in the absence of some of the evidence that would be necessary to be absolutely sure. The interpretation is inevitably colored by the purpose for which the historical write-up is expected to be used. If the educational historian, for instance, is writing in terms of a progressive ideal, the results will contain an interpretation of the artifactual evidence viewed through the lens of a progressive orientation. If a conservative (political or otherwise) lens is employed, the evidence will be interpreted differently from the way in which the progressive-oriented historian would interpret it, and the resulting story will bear the mark of this different perspective. What's more to the point, the way in which the researcher employs the established processes of historical inquiry will vary with the orientation chosen.

I have argued that the researcher, the historian or any other type, should at the very least explicate for the reader the orientation or perspective from which the work was done so that the reader is duly made aware of this as he/she reads the work. In fact, it seems to me to be an essential part of conducting inquiry of any type that the inquirer adopt a particular (what I would call) theory of inquiry within which the inquiry is to be conducted and that subsequently this theory of inquiry be stated publicly in the report. I would further suggest that this theory of inquiry be chosen deliberately and self-consciously so that the inquiry processes that are employed in the study can be followed in a reasoned and open manner consistent with this explicitly selected orientation or perspective. To leave all this implicit in the work leaves the work open to several possible charges: perhaps of hiding the value dimensions of inquiry, or perhaps of denying that they play any role in inquiry at all, or perhaps of confusing the reader by

being unclear about what is meant because the pervading value orientation has not been explicitly identified for the reader. I shall return later to this discussion of the place of theories of inquiry in doing research after mentioning some more examples related to some other forms of inquiry.

In scientific inquiry multiple theories of inquiry also have been evident. The technical-rational orientation has been employed in much educational research (often unacknowledged by the authors of the scientific studies) from the earliest 20th century scholars right down to today. Positivistic assumptions formed the basis for much of the scientific work in educational research from Thorndike to Tyler to Skinner. Behaviorist perspectives were at work as well in much of the psychological research in education from the 1930s to the 1960s. Humanistic orientations began to shift research in education away from these orientations by the 1970s. By the 1980s ethnographic studies—still scientific in character—were approaching their research problems quite differently from the behaviorists. Not only were the questions they asked different; their procedures and their logic of inquiry were also quite different. So we again can see that different scientific researchers in education can employ and do employ different "theories of inquiry" in their work whether they are made explicit or not. The recent treatment by Decker Walker of "Methodological Issues in Curriculum Research" (Handbook of Research in Curriculum, 1992, pp. 98-118) acknowledges this phenomenon at work in scientific inquiry in curriculum, as does Linda Darling-Hammonds' chapter in the same volume on the scientific traditions of research in curriculum studies (pp. 41-78).

Let me discuss this matter in somewhat more detail. Experimental research for example, even descriptive-analytic studies, utilize categories for labeling quantifiable phenomena. Even if

fully theoretical conceptual frameworks for these sorts of scientific studies are not explicitly drawn upon in defining the categories to be observed or measured, some implicit choice has been made in order to label the categories used. These labels inherently carry the value orientations that underlie these studies. Often they are treated as objective or analytic categories rather than value-influenced categories because of assumptions erroneously made by their authors or users. Every study therefore represents an instance of a particular value-stance that affects the choice of terms and categories used.

Even in the so-called scientific procedures used to carry out an empirical study, a normative theory of inquiry is inevitably adopted that governs the analysis and validity of the data and the conclusions drawn from the data. Witness the underlying assumptions operating within various statistical analyses. Inferences depend upon such things as whether results could have occurred by chance and whether the data used to determine not-by-chance results have validity that is more than face validity. When the interest in scientific inquiry turns to the more non-quantifiable conclusions of anthropological, political, or economic inquiry, the stance taken in interpreting the data and inferring conclusions is colored by a value-orientation taken toward the evidence and the probable uses to which the findings may be put. Note the innumerable AERA papers of these kinds in the program of this conference.

In research of the kind that is intentionally less scientific and more qualitative in character, there is perhaps more acknowledgment of the role that normative theories of inquiry play in the conduct of research and in the assertions that follow from such research. Yvonna Lincoln in her chapter in the 1992 Handbook of Research on Curriculum on the humanistic tradition in inquiry mentions the resistance of scholars known as the reconceptualists in

curriculum inquiry to the "extreme rationality inherent in the scientific management movement's influence on curriculum studies" (p. 85). "The political, emotive, expressive, artistic or humanistic, being basically unpredictable, uncontrolled, and uncontrollable, were elements missing from curriculum theory, and therefore, underattended as aspects of curriculum theorizing" (p. 85). The movement to engage in and to legitimate forms of inquiry beyond scientific and historical methods clearly represents the exercise of value-choices in what is significant to study and in how to study it. Beyond this trend, however, it is increasingly evident that within any of the more qualitative forms of inquiry different normative perspectives can also operate.

For example, in the work of aesthetic inquiry in education, the tools used by the aesthetic critic to discern and portray the qualitative discussions of the phenomenon being examined are affected by a normative perspective adopted by the inquirer. In The Good High School by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1983), for instance, the portrayals reflect an admiration for the subject matter that is quite different from the critical perspective taken by Linda McNeil in her study of Texas high schools in The Contradictions of Control (1988) or by Reba Page in her 1990 study of Curriculum Differentiation: Interpretive Studies in U.S. Secondary Schools. These researchers wisely indicated to their readers the perspectives from which their work was done and if you were to check how they chose to gather and analyze their data, you would see differences in the two approaches that match the two different perspectives even though they all similarly employed a basic aesthetic form of inquiry and attempted to portray the qualitative dimensions of the schools they studied.

Phenomenological/hermeneutical inquiry is another form of qualitative inquiry. This kind of research attempts to externalize the subjective experience of persons by means of researcher-subject interactions to approximate the final experience and felt meanings attached to these experiences. (See chapter 9 and chapter 10 in my Forms of Curriculum Inquiry.) Some instances of this kind of research employ a perspective that is essentially narrative in its attempt to grasp a connected story over time as in the case of Elbaz's Teacher Thinking: A Study of Practical Knowledge (1983) and of Clandinin's Classroom Practices: Teacher Images in Action (1986). Other work of this kind adopts essentially a feminist perspective as in the case of Janet Miller's Creating Spaces and Finding Voices: Teachers Collaborating for Empowerment (1990), and of Berman and others' Toward Curriculum for Being: Voices of Educators (1991). Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings' Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education (1991) combines both feminist and narrative theories of inquiry in their work on educator's lived experience and its meaning. These studies are explicit about both the form of inquiry utilized and the normative theory that pervades the use of that form of inquiry. One wishes that others in this genre were as careful to point out their perspectives as these researchers.

The form of inquiry that most carefully identifies the normative perspective from which it is done is probably that known as critical inquiry. (See chapter 13 in my Forms of Curriculum Inquiry.) It is seldom overlooked because this method inquiry explicitly attempts to critique some reality in terms of a norm or value that the researcher assumes is not present or not fully present in the reality and in addition assumes that the reality should be changed to conform more closely with the norm espoused. Schools that espouse but do not fully practice "social justice" or "gender fairness" or "democratic principles" or "morality" or other goals and ideals of this type

have been broadly studied by the methods of critical inquiry deriving from the work of European critical social theorists. Work by Friere, Giroux, Apple, and a great many other educational researchers exemplify this form of inquiry over recent years. Even here an occasional study does not explicitly identify the normative perspective from which it is operating and leaves those who read the critique guessing as to which perspective it is that has guided the research. This is true of those which spend more time advocating ways to remediate the missing or contradictory norms than in grounding the prescriptions in evidence of the problem or in identifying the norm that is lacking in that reality.

Certain kinds of action and/or deliberative research often proceed without fully identifying the normative perspective of the parties involved in deciding on courses of action to take or in enacting those decisions. However, because resolution of conflicts among desired courses of action that are proposed in the situation for reaching the desired goal is at the heart of deliberative/action research, these normative perspectives that at first may be hidden or unexplicated usually surface and are dealt with by the participants. In fact, if resolution of differences of perspective on desired courses of action is not realized, action taken will usually not achieve what was hoped for and new actions must be devised and tried. It is often not the actions that are ineffective per se as much as it is the persistence of disagreements over the match between ends and means that account for not being able to achieve the desired outcomes. So these disagreements must be attended to directly.

With all these examples of the place of normative theories of inquiry in conducting inquiry of various types, the summary point that can be made is that the use of multiple theories of inquiry in educational research is evident when one looks at what is going on and that this is

really all right. The worst thing that could happen in educational research is for all inquiry to proceed from a single normative perspective (or even from a limited few perspectives). Part of the generative value of doing inquiry comes from not being trapped into thinking in one way, using one method, or proceeding as if one perspective is best. Eisner has reviewed this dilemma in his chapter in the Handbook of Research in Curriculum (1992) or "Curriculum Ideologies." (Eisner cites six ideologies: religious orthodoxy, rational humanism, progressionism, critical theory, reconceptualism, and cognitive pluralism. Perhaps there are others as well.) The effect of ideologies on research practice is inescapable, but the trick is to utilize them knowingly and without a sense of orthodoxy. I have argued here that identifying the normative theory of inquiry that one uses in research is a standard that all researchers should be expected to adhere to—not that they should be avoided or unacknowledged.